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CAROLINA CONNECTIONS

NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH CAROLINA SEASONAL UPDATE

FALL 2013/
WINTER 2014

Restoring the National Forests in North Carolina

Working with a variety of partners, the U.S. Forest Service National Forests in North Carolina (NFsNC) is working to restore native plants and animals to the Nantahala, Pisgah, Uwharrie, and Croatan National Forests.

For example, restoring fire and oak trees in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests, which encompass more than 1 million acres, is among the top priorities for the Forest Service in western North Carolina.

The following are just some of the restoration projects underway in these two national forests.

Armstrong Creek Project

NFsNC is receiving funds from the Forest Service Southern Region's Southern Appalachian Restoration Initiative to expand its restoration work on the Grandfather Ranger District. In 2011, NFsNC identified the Armstrong Creek

Watershed in the Grandfather Restoration Project area as a priority watershed. The additional funding will also provide needed support to engage private landowners in the development of restoration projects across ownerships.

Restoring Structural Diversity and Creating Early Successional Habitats

The forest timber program has emphasized increasing both age and species diversity within stands by using a variety of silvicultural methods, including the "two-aged system" where a percentage of trees in a stand are not cut, but are left to provide structural variety and encourage regeneration of intolerant and mid-tolerant species.

Golden-Winged Warbler Restoration

NFsNC has projects underway in

(continued on page 6)

Nantahala-Pisgah Plan Revision Continues

The National Forests in North Carolina (NFsNC) continues the process of revising the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests management plan. The agency will complete the Assessment Phase this fall and begin the Planning Phase.

The draft Assessment summary is an important tool that will be used to develop the draft Plan.

The assessment compiles data on current forest conditions provided by stakeholders over the past year. Check the Plan revision website, www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision, for documents, summaries and other Plan revision-related information.

The Plan revision process will take about 3 years to complete. Once

revised, the Plan will guide management of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests for approximately 15 years.

The Forest Service published the original Plan in 1987. A significant amended was published in 1994, and smaller amendments occurred in subsequent years.

Be involved. Help Plan the Forest's Future!

Visit us online at www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc

Spend Fall and Winter along the Coast

New Recreation Guide

The U.S. Forest Service has published a new recreation guide to the Croatan National Forest. The guide is available online at <http://alturl.com/r9umx>.

The Croatan National Forest Recreation Guide serves as the primary source of information for recreation in the national forest. The guide gives visitors the information they need to have an enjoyable visit in the 160,000-acre forest along North Carolina's coast. The publication offers general information about the forest and special features. It provides details on where visitors can boat, hike or ride off-highway vehicle riding and horses. The guide also includes safety tips and a colorful map.

Hard copies of the guide are available at the Croatan Ranger District office, 141 E. Fisher Ave., New Bern, N.C. 28560.

Riding Off-Road

Five local stores now sell daily and seasonal passes to the Black Swamp Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trail system in the Croatan National Forest.

OHV enthusiasts can purchase passes at the following locations:

- Fisher Oil, 110 Riverdale Rd., New Bern, N.C. 28562
- Fisher Oil, Carolina Pines, 100 Carolina Pines Blvd, New Bern, N.C. 28560
- Fisher Oil, Pender Park, 2845 Hwy 24, Newport, N.C. 28570
- Merchants Grocery Co., 1801 Brices Creek Rd., New Bern, N.C. 28562
- H&D Express, 3439 Hwy 24, Newport, N.C. 28570

Season passes cost \$30 per vehicle, and daily passes cost \$5 per vehicle. Passes are still available at the Croatan Ranger District office.

The Black Swamp OHV area offers eight off-highway-vehicle trail miles for riders. The trail is designated for all-terrain vehicles, trail bikes and four-wheel drives with a wheel base less than 50 inches. For more information about the OHV area, as

well as tips on safety, visit <http://alturl.com/e4s4j>.

Firewood Permits

Nearby residents of the national forest can harvest firewood from the Croatan National Forest if they purchase a firewood removal permit. Permits may be purchased at the Croatan Ranger Station office beginning around the third week of October. A permit costs \$20 for approximately four cords of firewood. A permit holder may take a maximum of 16 cords (or four permits) of firewood in a calendar year.

Firewood may not be harvested in wilderness areas, campgrounds and day-use areas. Permit holders are limited to harvesting dead and down trees; standing trees (live or dead) may not be cut. Firewood permits must be in the permit holder's possession while harvesting and transporting products. Permit sales by the Croatan National Forest are final and cannot be refunded or transferred. Firewood harvested under these permits is for personal use only and may not be resold.



Harvesting downed wood can supply permit holders with much-needed warmth during the winter months.

Cheoah Ranger District

If viewing fall foliage is on the list of things to do, there are a number of scenic drives in and around the Cheoah Ranger District to take in autumn's vibrant colors.

Among them is the Cherohala Skyway in Graham County. Twisting through scenery that rivals the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Cherohala Skyway crosses through the Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests connecting Tellico Plains in southeast Tennessee to

Robbinsville, N.C. The Skyway's name comes from a combination of the two forests (Chero, from the Cherokee and hala from the Nantahala).

In late winter, the Cheoah Ranger District conducts prescribed burning to reduce woody debris, prevent catastrophic wildfires and promote habitat for native plants and animals. Fire has been part of Southern Appalachian forests for thousands of years. Using prescribed burns, the Forest Service is restoring fire to the mountains of North Carolina. All prescribed burns are completed by trained professionals in accordance with approved, detailed plans.

Nantahala Ranger District

Visitors to the district's two shooting ranges will see some improvements.

The U.S. Forest Service and partners improved Moss Knob Shooting Range by building a new access road to the shooting range from behind the shooting line. They also constructed a new earthen backstop for each shooting line to make the range more attractive and easier to maintain. The work also included drain work, as well as filling and leveling along the firing line. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Smoky Mountain Sportsman's Club and the National Rifle Association partnered in the project.

The Forest Service also improved safety and other features of the Dirty

John Shooting Range. District staff added earthen back stops behind the 7-yard line and the 50-yard line. In addition, Forest Service personnel improved drainage on the shooting range.



Dirty John Shooting Range

Tusquitee Ranger District

The Tusquitee Ranger District conducts prescribed burns on 3,500-5,000 acres each year. Many of those prescribed burns are conducted during winter (also known as the dormant season). [Last winter](#), burns were conducted on about 1,600 acres.

A variety of experts, ranging from government and university scientists to nonprofit researchers, believe [returning fire to the Southern Appalachians](#) offers numerous benefits. These low- to medium-intensity prescribed burns can:

- Reduce woody debris and hazardous

fuels that could contribute to high-severity fires.

- Reduce the frequency of destructive fires that could threaten communities.
- Mimic what occurs in nature, producing healthier, more diverse and more resilient forests.
- Promote more desirable fire-tolerant native plants, such as oaks and shrubs that provide food for wildlife.
- Restore threatened plants and communities, such as table mountain pine and mountain golden heather.
- Reduce certain forest pests, such as southern pine beetle, and non-native plants.

Appalachian Ranger District

Matt McCombs is the [new Appalachian District ranger](#).

Since 2011, Matt has served as the deputy district ranger for the 652,000 acre Eagle-Holy Cross Ranger District on the White River National Forest near Vail, Colo. Earlier this year, Matt served for several months as acting ranger of the Cheoah and Tusquitee Ranger districts in the Nantahala National Forest in North Car-



Matt McCombs

olina.

A Colorado native, Matt earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Montana and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Colorado.

"During his tenure with the Forest Service, Matt has worked with a wide range of partners on numerous natural resource issues in Colorado and Washington State," said Kristin Bail, Forest Supervisor of the National Forests in North Carolina. "His breadth of knowledge and varied experiences in government will serve him well as the next Appalachian District ranger."

Grandfather Ranger District

The Grandfather Ranger District offers several areas that are ideal for viewing fall foliage either by car touring or hiking. The Highway 181 corridor in Burke County traveling north offers a stunning view of Table Rock and Brown Mountain. There is a road-side viewing area where travelers can stop and enjoy the colorful fall foliage and get out and stretch their legs. Two interpretive signs describe the view to the east and west. For viewing fall foliage by foot in McDowell County, make the short 1.3-mile hike

to Kitsuma Peak to enjoy a stunning view of Ridgecrest, Young's Ridge and Allison Ridge. The Point Lookout Trail out of Old Fort also offers opportunities to view fall foliage. This three-to-four mile paved trail is open to pedestrian and bicycle use. For longer car touring on Forest Service gravel roads, try the Watauga Turnpike which offers views of the Lost Cove/Harper Creek areas.

For a list of other scenic drives in the National Forests in North Carolina, visit www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc and click on "[take scenic drives](#)."

Pisgah Ranger District

With the onset of fall, leaf-viewing season comes to the Pisgah Ranger District. The rich fall colors of the Pisgah attract people from all over the country. The optimal leaf viewing times can be found on the National Forests in North Carolina website, www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc.

Don't forget about your National Forests during the winter months. Off-

season recreation is a great way to escape and find peaceful solitude. Some areas, such as Wash Creek Horse Camp, Pink Beds and Sycamore Flats Picnic Shelters can be reserved year-round at www.recreation.gov.

Please remember: while black bears slow down during the colder months, they do not hibernate. Remember to be "bear aware" by storing food in a tree or in a bear-proof container, and practice other [bear safety measures](#).

Update on Flintlock Shooting Range and More

Flintlock Shooting Range to Reopen

The U.S. Forest Service is working with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) to reopen the Flintlock Valley Shooting Range in the Uwharrie National Forest. NCWRC is providing funding through a cost-share agreement to fix the safety issues at the shooting range. The Forest Service expects the range to reopen in winter 2014. The range was closed in 2010 because of safety concerns following two incidents that involved stray bullets.

Hunting Safety

Fall is a popular time to hunt in the Uwharrie National Forest. Hunters must possess the proper licenses and abide by all guidelines set forth by the [NCWRC](#). Guidelines for carrying firearms in the National Forests in North Carolina are available online at: www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc, click on “[hunt](#).”

Hunters should follow these simple tips to ensure their outdoor experience is safe and enjoyable:

- Be alert when hunting near developed areas and trails. Other recreationists are in the forest as well. Hunting is prohibited within 150 yards of recreation sites and other developed areas.
- Check weather reports before visiting the forest.
- Tell someone where you will hunt and when you will return.
- Be familiar with the area you want to hunt.
- Dress properly and be prepared for the worst possible conditions.
- During certain seasons, hunters must wear hunter orange viewable from all directions.
- If accompanied by a dog, the dog should also wear hunter orange or a very visible color on a vest, leash, coat or bandana.
- Check hunting equipment before

and after each outing, and maintain it properly. Familiarize yourself with its operation before using it in the field.

- Carry a spare set of dry clothing. Utilize layering techniques to wick away moisture while retaining body warmth.
- Always bring rain gear.
- Clearly identify your target before shooting. Prevent unfortunate accidents or fatalities.
- Avoid wearing white or tan during deer season. Wear hunter orange or another highly visible color.

A Cool Time to Ride Horseback

As temperatures cool in the fall and winter, more riders and their horses will be seen in the Uwharrie.

At Badin Lake Recreation Area, riders can choose from 24 trails that total about 40 miles. These trails range from easy to difficult as they traverse beautifully wooded areas, rocky outcrops, and follow the Uwharrie River and many of its tributaries. [Canebrake Horse Camp](#) has 28 sites available to the public. All sites have electrical hookups with 50 amp, 30 amp and 110 volt outlets. This campground has amenities for horse use but is not exclusive to horseback riders. Some of these horse amenities are a horse washing station, hitching posts, tack tables and direct access to the trails.

Horses must remain on trails to avoid causing erosion or other damage to the land. Also, use a tree-saver strap to tether your horse between two trees. Use weed-free feed. Scatter manure, pick up trash and fill in pawed holes. Ensure campfires are dead out. Riders should yield to motorized vehicles, but hikers and bikers should yield to equestrians. Say hello, and give them instructions about where to wait while passing. A horse crossing a state line is required to have a negative Coggins test within the last year. Before leaving, clean campsites and hitchingpost areas and throw away all trash in receptacles. Make sure all fires are dead out.

UWHARRIE NATIONAL FOREST

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and serving people.*

Restoring the National Forests in North Carolina (cont'd from pg 1)

the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests to create early successional habitat and benefit the golden-winged warbler, among other desirable animal species. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is reviewing the status of the golden-winged warbler for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act. Increased habitat would promote the return of this warbler species.

Restoration of ecologically important, native tree species and plants is a priority at the Uwharrie National Forest. Located in central North Carolina, the national forest encompasses more than 50,000 acres.

Longleaf Pine Restoration in the Uwharrie

The revised Uwharrie National Forest management plan seeks to restore at least 100 acres a year of longleaf pine, by converting loblolly plantations into longleaf and increasing the amount of prescribed burns to 6,000 acres a year. Fire is a critical component in longleaf restoration and the increase in burning (in particular during the growing season) would increase the frequency of fire. The Forest currently has about 3,000 acres of longleaf pine stands. The addition of another 1,500 acres over the life of this plan would expand the land base that could support future Red-cockaded woodpecker populations.

Oak/hickory Restoration in the Uwharrie

Oak/hickory restoration is an important element of the new Uwharrie National Forest plan. Loblolly pine stands are maturing and offer an oppor-

tunity to restore the potential natural vegetation which includes oak/hickory forests. NFsNC plans to restore up to 200 acres a year for this forest type. This will benefit the endangered Schweinitz's sunflower, as this plant occurs both in pine and hardwood type.

Restoration of the longleaf pine tree is a primary focus of the Forest Service in the Croatan National Forest and across the South.

Longleaf Pine and Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) Restoration –

The Croatan National Forest is comprised of 160,000 acres of which about 13,000 acres is longleaf pine. Currently, the Forest harvests timber each year, comprised mostly of loblolly pine; plants about 100 - 150 acres a year to longleaf pine, and conducts prescribed burns on about 20,000 - 25,000 acres each year to help restore the fire-adapted longleaf pine.

In addition, NFsNC is working with the Defense Department and other partners to restore RCWs. The RCW population on the Croatan National Forest is currently stable or slightly increasing with 71 active clusters.

At one time, longleaf pine forests once occupied about 90 million acres across the South. Today, the longleaf pine occurs in approximately 3 percent of its original range.

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